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Power Tips for Organizing Your Outlook Inbox

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Power tips for organizing your Outlook Inbox

Microsoft Outlook offers a wealth of Inbox management settings that you can use to customize the appearance of the Inbox to suit your needs. This document gives you tips on some ways to organize your Inbox, namely how to:

Group e-mail messages by thread and sort by date.

Color-code e-mail messages.

Format the font attributes of e-mail messages.

Create and formulate a new user-defined field.

Group e-mail messages by thread and sort by date

Grouping related e-mail messages together (that is, grouping them according to threads and sorting them by date) makes an e-mail conversation easy to follow.

To group messages by thread and sort by date

1.   Right-click the column header bar. This is the bar above your e-mail messages, with the column headings **From**, **Subject**, and so on.

2.   Click **Group By Box** on the shortcut menu.

3.   Right-click the column header bar again.

4.   Click **Field Chooser** on the shortcut menu. This displays the **Field Chooser** dialog box.

5.   Drag the **Conversation** field to the **Group By** box.

Now, see how the e-mail messages are grouped by conversation on a particular subject and sorted in descending order based on date and time.

Note To undo, first display the **Field Chooser** dialog box as in steps 3 and 4. Then drag the **Conversation** field from the **Group By** box back to the **Field Chooser** dialog box.

Color-code e-mail messages

How quickly you should respond to an e-mail message often depends on who sent it and who the e-mail message recipients are. For example, if the e-mail message is from your manager and you are the sole recipient, more likely than not, you would need to respond to it quickly.

You might also want to know at a glance, without actually opening an e-mail message, whether you are the sole recipient or it was sent to a group of people. You can do this by color-coding your e-mail messages. You can easily modify your Inbox view to display color-coding by formatting the font color of your e-mail messages.

To color-code your messages

1.   On the **Tools** menu, click **Organize** to display the **Ways to Organize Inbox** task pane.

2.   Click **Using Colors**.

3.   Click an e-mail message in your Inbox, and you will find the name of the sender displayed in the **Color messages** box. Or, you can type the name in the **Color messages** box yourself.

4.   Select a color from the list.

5.   Click **Apply Color**.

6.   To color-code e-mail messages sent to you only, select a color from the **Show messages sent only to me in** list. Click **Turn on** to set the color. To undo, click **Turn off**.

For example, you might set messages from Jay Adams to red, e-mail messages sent only to you might be set to blue, and group e-mail messages might be set to black.

Note To undo or select another color, follow the previous steps and reselect your color preferences.

Format font attributes

Responding to e-mail messages in a timely manner is critical to efficient communication. One of the ways that can help you see quickly how long ago you received messages is by

formatting the font attributes of the e-mail messages in your Inbox.

To format the font attributes of messages

1.   Right-click the column header bar.

2.   Click **Customize Current View** on the shortcut menu. This displays the **View Summary** dialog box.

3.   Click **Automatic Formatting**. This displays the **Automatic Formatting** dialog box.

4.   Click **Add**, and then click **Condition**. This displays the **Filter** dialog box.

5.   Click the **Advanced** tab, and then click **Field**.

6.   Point to **Date/Time fields**, and then click **Received**.

7.   In the **Condition** list, click **yesterday**.

8.   Click **Add to List**, and then click **OK** to close the **Filter** dialog box.

9.   Back in the **Automatic Formatting** dialog box, click **Font** to apply formatting. This displays the **Font** dialog box.

10.   Select your font preferences, and then click **OK**.

11.   In the **Name** box, type an appropriate name. Note that the exact name now appears as one of the selections in the **Rules for this view** list.

12.   Click **OK**.

Repeat these steps for each type of formatting you want. The e-mail messages that arrive today are formatted to appear in normal font, yesterday's messages are in italic font, and messages two or more days old are italicized and underlined.

Note To undo, follow the preceding steps and make your changes accordingly.

Create and formulate a new user-defined field

You can also add a custom column to your Inbox that shows the age of e-mail messages in hours and days.

To show the age of e-mail in hours and days

1. Right-click the column header bar, and then click **Field Chooser** on the shortcut menu.

2. Click **New**. This displays the **New Field** dialog box.

3. In the **Type** list, click **Formula**.

4. In the **Formula** box, type the following formula: **DateDiff("h",[Received],Now())**

5. Type a name for this formula in the **Name** box, such as **E-mail Age**, and then click **OK**. Notice that back in the **Field Chooser** dialog box, **User-defined fields in Inbox** is now displayed in the list, and the field that you just defined (**E-mail Age**) is shown below it.

6. Drag the new field you just created to the column header bar, placing it next to the column heading **Received**.

7. Notice that even though the new column has been added, it is not formatted properly yet. To format it, right-click the column header bar.

8. On the shortcut menu, click **Format Columns**.

9. This displays the **Format Columns** dialog box. The field you created earlier, which is **E-mail Age**, should be in the **Available fields** list. Click **E-mail Age**.

10. In the **Formula** box, type the following formula: **DateDiff("h",[Received],Now()) & " hours (" & DateDiff("d",[Received],Now()) & " day(s)) old"**

11. Click **OK**.

You can now quickly and easily see how old the e-mail messages in your Inbox are.

Note To undo, right-click the column header bar. Next, click **Field Chooser** on the shortcut menu. Drag **E-mail Age** from the column header bar to the **Field Chooser** dialog box.